

Joan and the Jesse Window

HOW AN AMERICAN GIRL ABROAD EARNED HER LIVING FOR
A DAY

By Margaret Busbee Shipp

JOAN CHENOWETH consulted her platinum wrist-watch, in which some discreetly small diamonds twinkled.

"Half past nine! In three hours and a half I'll have no lunch, and in three more I'll have no tea, and three hours after that it will be time to have no dinner. Even architecture is better than slow starvation. If I had known how brutal that man in the bank would be, I'd have gone to the abbey to see that Jesse window!"

Joan's meaning may not be entirely clear. In fact, her state of mind was so chaotic that its contents need to be arranged alphabetically.

Abbey—An old church at Dorchester, a village on the Thames, containing a celebrated Jesse window. At the bottom of the window is the stone figure of Jesse, the father of David, and springing from him the genealogical tree with the figures of his descendants on its branches. The stone branches of the tree make the mullions and tracery of the window. Joan had inexorably refused to evince the slightest interest in it. Even the most accommodating worm will turn somewhere, and this window was where the girl had obstinately decided to turn.

Architecture—Her Aunt Cornelia's latest fad. Aunt Cornelia Brennan was magnificently exuberant. It was amazing that a person could bubble for years and not boil over and have done with it. Uncle Henry Brennan possessed a lazy sense of humor, and his wife's enthusiasms diverted him. Last year it had been peacocks—the neglected bird of Juno. Peacocks strutted about on the lawn and deafened everybody with their hideous cries. Aunt Cornelia, gorgeous in peacock-blue velvet, with a peacock-feather fan large enough for a fire-screen, was eloquent in descriptions of the

days of chivalry when solemn oaths were sworn "on the peacock" at stately banquets. She suggested to Uncle Henry that it would be a splendid idea for his Rotary Club to adopt for their luncheons; but when Joan returned from college for the Easter vacation, not a stray feather was in evidence. The furniture was upholstered in a cubistic design, and Aunt Cornelia was immersed in free verse. Uncle Henry, who had been tolerant toward genealogy, folklore, china-painting, Japanese prints, and birds of Juno, became restive under evenings of free verse.

It was through a poem to a skyscraper that Aunt Cornelia was aroused to the defense of the ancient forms of building. She began to swallow books on Gothic art like a hungry constrictor, and she purposed to spend the summer assimilating them. At Mr. Brennan's suggestion Joan had come over to England with them. A hundred attractions beckoned to the girl, whose first visit it was, but her aunt insisted that they must not be diverted from her plan of dedicating their days to what she called a "Perpendicular pilgrimage."

With a staggering list of parish churches to be done in a week, Aunt Cornelia had just set forth in the car with her husband, while Joan begged to be allowed to stay in Oxford until their return. She was cozily settled in lodgings which were occupied by students during the term, and she yearned for a few quiet days to revel in her own will. Their week in Oxford had been spent in indefatigable sightseeing—or rather Aunt Cornelia and Joan had trotted about ceaselessly, while Uncle Henry basked in undefined engine troubles which demanded his personal supervision.

Joan spent her first afternoon of freedom in a riot of shopping, as it was her first op-

portunity to select presents without supervision. In an antique shop she chanced upon a most enticing silver pitcher, one that her mother would adore. Another customer decided to take it, then decided not to decide that afternoon. As soon as she was out of the door Joan pounced upon the treasure, but it was rather an extravagant purchase, and left her with barely enough shillings to buy her dinner.

Brute in Bank—The next morning, with a joyous sense of an unencumbered day, Joan went to the bank to cash a check which her mother had sent a few days before. When a check came, Joan merely indorsed it to Uncle Henry—who was her guardian and her mother's brother—and he thrust it into his pocket and gave her the money, and that was all there was to that; but it seemed the matter wasn't so simple on one's own responsibility. She handed it to the cashier and asked pleasantly:

"I'd like part of it in change, please."

The cashier examined the check somewhat superciliously.

"Do you actually expect me to pay you four hundred and thirty-five dollars on that check?" he inquired.

He was a married man, and things had not gone well at breakfast; and even if he noticed that it was an extraordinarily pretty girl who was speaking, it meant nothing to him.

"But that's the big Southern cotton-mills, and everybody knows it's a perfectly good check," she protested.

"I don't mean to be personal, of course, but how do I know you didn't pick it up on the street? You would have to be identified, you know."

"Oh, I have a passport," she began.

"You might have picked that up along with the check," said the man.

This made Joan's temper flash.

"It would be difficult to arrange a face to match the photograph on the passport at such short notice."

"Oh, I don't know," returned the cashier. "Photographs are often misleading. We are not cashing American dividend checks, as I said. Even if we did, we should have to deduct six shillings out of every pound, as that is the British tax on dividend checks, English or foreign."

He returned to his figures with calm finality, and Joan walked out of the bank.

It was half past nine on a glorious morning, and she had no meal in prospect until

to-morrow's breakfast. Mr. Brennan had arranged for breakfast with their landlady, but they were to go out for their other meals; it was only on this condition that she had consented to take them, as her cook was on a vacation.

If Joan confided that she was suddenly penniless, her landlady might regard her as a doubtful risk and turn her out altogether. At the thought of trying to reach the Brennans by wire, her teeth clenched. Whatever happened, Aunt Cornelia should never know.

Alone in Oxford, unknown, penniless, equipped with nothing but youth and health and a week's sightseeing—what was one to do?

Her resolution seemed to leap at her, full-grown.

"If I could meet some nice women from the United States and guide them over Oxford! If I could earn my own living for a week—wouldn't it be *fun*?"

II

SHE had exactly threepence in her purse. She spent one penny for bus fare to the station and another for a platform ticket. When the next train deposited its passengers, she chose the most promising—a woman—and went up to her. Her heart beat fast as she ventured timidly:

"W-would you like a g-guide, madam?"

An unmistakably English voice greeted a belated brother, and then its owner turned to Joan.

"Sorry! Did you ask me something?"

"Nothing of any importance," Joan stammered, backing away.

As they passed out of sight she took herself to task.

"Idiot! Nobody would want a scared rabbit for a guide. When the next train comes I'm going to be as bold as—as a porter!"

She felt apprehensive lest her platform ticket might have a time limit, and she was relieved when another train came and a number of passengers got off. They all looked busy and occupied, and not in the least desirous of being personally conducted. Then she saw a man carrying a pigskin suit-case with the name in small letters:

R. C. VIDMER, New York.

This was her chance. She held her voice level and asked with a naturalness which gratified her:

"Do you wish a guide over Oxford?"

The tall young man looked at her in surprise.

"A guide?" he repeated rather doubtfully.

His hesitation gave her courage.

"The price is only three shillings and sixpence. Oxford isn't one great big university like Harvard, you know; it's twenty-one—I think it's twenty-one—different colleges. You will lose a great deal of time if you do not have some competent person to guide you. It is impossible to see them all in one day—"

"I should think it might be!" said the man.

His manner was slightly hostile, as if he were on guard.

"But I will do the best I can to give you an instructive tour." She flamed scarlet as she added: "It is customary to give the porter at each college a small gratuity when he shows the chapel or hall. That is not included in my—er—fee."

The man stood irresolute, then decided suddenly:

"If you will wait a moment, while I check this, I shall be glad to avail myself of your offer."

When he joined her, she suggested that they might walk to Worcester College first, as that was the nearest one.

"With a limited time at your disposal," she began, in a manner which was bravely professional except that her voice trembled a little, "it is manifestly impossible to see all the colleges, so I think we had best see the special beauties of as many as we can."

"And what is Worcester's *pièce de résistance*?" he asked, a shade indifferently.

"I think it is the copper beech in the gardens," she answered, and for some reason the reply seemed to amuse him.

They passed through the arch which led from the green quadrangle into the gardens, and Joan showed him a great copper beech with its leaves purple-bronze in the sunshine.

"Isn't it superbly glorious? It makes one think of Joyce Kilmer's—"

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree!

None of the other gardens has a lake. I wish we had some bread to feed the swans." To herself she thought with sudden viciousness: "And I'd probably steal it from them to eat myself!"

She sensed Vidmer's apathy. Probably he was one of the many tourists who want to see what there is to be seen, so as not to feel cheated out of anything, but who at heart are bored. It seemed a pity when a man was young and strong, for it showed that his spirit was either dull or smug. Well, he was going to see things to-day. Her first client should have the worth of his three and six to the uttermost farthing!

From Worcester she led him to the Ashmolean Museum.

"But we aren't going in there?" he rebelled. "I detest purposeless poking around in museums. It's different if one goes with a definite object."

"We had a definite object." She stuck stoutly to her guns. "It was to see Powhatan's robe—the father of Pocahontas, you know. I was looking at it the other day, and I overheard a learned man talking. At least I suppose he was learned, because he had a fierce black beard and he used words like 'neolithic' and 'megalthic' quite casually. This robe of Powhatan's is embroidered in tiny gray shells, in a design of kangaroos. The bearded man said it proved that animal life over all the world was originally the same, and that kangaroos were once as plentiful in Virginia as they are in Australia to-day."

For the first time the client "came alive," as Joan put it to herself. His laugh was contagious, his voice confidential as he advised:

"You know I don't believe your bearded friend put in *all* the time in science that he saved in not shaving! Mayn't I just take your word for it about Powhatan's kangaroos hopping over old Virginia?"

Her smile mirrored his.

"I was going to show you that robe for its historical interest, but we'll go straight to St. John's gardens for pure joy. Just now the rockery is in bloom with that saxifrage the French call '*désespoir du peintre*' because it's a color which baffles the painter."

"I *am* in luck!" he answered gravely. "Lead me to it."

III

It was fortunate that Joan was as resilient as a young willow, for strenuous hours followed.

After they had seen Magdalen College they strolled for a short distance on Addison's Walk.

"Last week you would have believed Addison webfooted, for his walk was like a puddle," Joan told her client. "I'm glad it's sunny to-day when you are seeing it for the first time. Doesn't Addison himself seem different to you since you've seen that youthful picture of him in the college hall? How absurd it is to contend that personal beauty is only for the day and hour—as if all the world hasn't felt the spell of Helen's beauty, or Mary Stuart's, of Lord Byron's or Rupert Brooke's." It pleased Vidmer that she could praise beauty without a trace of self-consciousness in her charming face. "Did I tell you that this was the young Prince of Wales's college, and that it's pronounced 'Maudlin'?"

She took him to Keble to see Holman Hunt's "Light of the World"; to Lincoln to see Wesley's pulpit; to Pembroke to see Dr. Johnson's teapot. At Balliol she pointed out the tiny gold circle and the yellowed volume which were the original "Ring and the Book" with childlike homage.

"You are fond of Browning, then?" he asked gently.

"I simply can't imagine life without Browning, Barrie, and swimming," she answered with such earnestness that he forbore to smile.

She would not permit any indifference on Vidmer's part. In fact, her attitude was comically unlike the bored unconcern of the average guide, and bore more resemblance to that of a bantam with an unruly duckling. For instance, in the quadrangle at Christ Church, she came to a sudden stand.

"The sooner you look aware that you are seeing the most beautiful grass in the world, the sooner you may see something else."

Her client made an exaggerated gesture of helplessness.

"I have never been so hectored and bullied in my life! Just why is this grass any grassier than what we saw at St. John's or Magdalen?"

"It isn't, but it's the largest quadrangle, and so there's more of it to admire," she explained, with Kentucky loyalty to a perfect sward. "And now, if you are sure you appreciate its greenness properly, I'll show you the glorious hall, and the kitchen, with its gridiron big enough to roast a sheep. I suppose in old times a fat sheep cost about as much as a lamb chop does to-day."

"I've been hungry ever since you said

that the library at Merton had an atmosphere of 'tree calf and seasoned brains.' It had such an appetizing sound! After we see the kitchen, don't you think it will be quite time for lunch?"

"Very well," she agreed. "Then I'll meet you afterwards, to finish the others. I've saved some of the best for the last."

He looked dismayed.

"Surely you are going to have lunch with me? Won't you, please? We should lose time by separating."

"As you like." She tried to speak as if luncheon were a matter of minor importance. "In order not to lose time—"

So they went to a quaint hotel and made an excellent meal.

"May I introduce myself? I'm Richard Vidmer, from New York."

"I am Miss Chenoweth," she returned amiably. "For the present I am staying in Oxford."

"You have been pursuing your — er — avocation for some time?"

"Not very long. You will have to forgive my mistakes and omissions." Then she confessed penitently. "I am already ashamed of one of them. When we were in the hall at Christ Church, I knew I ought to show you the fan-tracery vaulting over the staircase, and I just *wouldn't*."

"Why did you try to conceal a ceiling from me?" he demanded.

"You said that you were 'rather fed up on sun-dials.' That's exactly how I feel about Perpendicular—Norman, Early English, and Decorated, too; but especially Perpendicular."

There was no question now but that she was holding his entire attention.

"As a diet, isn't that a bit unusual?" he asked.

"It may seem so to you," she answered gloomily; "but any day for breakfast I am apt to have a gargoye, piscina, stoup, ogee, apse, quoin, abacus, clerestory, triforium, or a flying buttress."

At his delighted laughter her mood became more expansive.

"Do you know some one intimately, of whom you are very fond, who is perfectly mad over architecture?" she asked.

He debated it.

"I do know a chap or two who lose their heads the same way; but architecture is a big word. What is there about it that you don't like?"

"It's the detail, I think. We've been to

Winchester recently, to see the cathedral. I never saw such purity of loveliness! It made one feel that it ought to be so simple to be good. It's breath-taking for one man to have founded that great cathedral, Winchester College, and New College — each work big enough for a single lifetime; but I couldn't sit there and dream about it all, because I had to look at the masonry."

"May I venture to inquire why?" he said, bewildered.

She enlightened his ignorance.

"Because wide-jointed masonry and fine-jointed masonry is the distinction between early and late Norman work. It's highly important, but not tremendously entertaining."

"Perhaps William of Wykeham would rather have one feel the finished beauty of the cathedral than fuss over the masonry," he smiled, "though that is interesting enough in its way. And so now I have the dark secret of the fan-tracery? While of course I disapprove of your secrecy in the matter, I could hardly demand a complete tour of Oxford and a thorough course in architecture for three and six."

She disdained to notice this.

"We're taking too long over our coffee when there's still so much to see. You'll love the Shelley Memorial."

As they walked along the High, "the noblest old street in England," they passed the new building of Oriel, with the statue of Cecil Rhodes. Vidmer bared his head for a moment.

"A great Englishman, and a citizen of the world," he said.

Later on, in the quadrangle at New College, Joan looked puzzled.

"There ought to be a big library over there where a luncheon was given for Mark Twain when he received his degree. This college is different from any other in the world, because there are no students here."

"What?" He shot the question at her in amazement. "No students at New?"

"There are only fellows here," she explained. "When distinguished men come to Oxford to get degrees, this is where they stay. I can't imagine why everything seems changed in some way." She consulted her note-book and exclaimed with relief: "Why, it's All Souls where there are no undergraduates, and where they had Mark Twain and Marconi and everybody! I'm very, very sorry I mixed them up."

"I am tempted to dock you threepence

for misinformation," he threatened. She looked faintly alarmed at the possibility.

"Shall we go into the chapel now?" he asked with a sudden impulse.

They chanced to be the only two people in the chapel at the time; and when presently the man knelt down for a moment, the girl knelt beside him, conscious that his face had whitened under its tan.

Then they went into the quiet gardens, where the wall, gray and inscrutable, seemed long since to have forgotten the old wars and young lovers on whom its parapets had looked down.

"No more colleges to-day, please!" It was as if he asked a favor. "Suppose we punt to Parson's Pleasure? You've had a rather strenuous day, though you don't look fagged."

"I shall be glad to go," she said with ready confidence.

She felt a thrill of pride in American manhood. How naturally he had accepted her on her own terms, how perfectly he had refrained from personalities or inquisitiveness! She wondered if it would be conceivable to a Frenchman, a Spaniard, or an Italian to pass a day with an unknown girl in just the simple and detached way this man had done.

IV

THEY strolled to the place where boats were kept for hire. Vidmer had made his negotiations with a youth, and had helped Joan into the boat, when an older man came from out of the boat-house and hurried toward Vidmer in eager greeting.

"I thought I heard your voice, sir! It's a long time since you've been up, Mr. Vidmer."

"It's good to see you again, Billy!"

They shook hands warmly.

"It makes me think of Captain McNeill to see you, sir."

There were a few sentences which Joan couldn't understand, though she caught the word "toggers," and—never having heard of the Torpid Races—wondered whether one wore it, ate it, or played it.

Then Vidmer said good-by, got into the boat, and punted along in silence. It was a deadly, shamed silence; for each one was afraid to speak. Vidmer had the advantage, because he could pretend to be occupied with his pole.

Joan gave way first.

"It wasn't fair to let me make an idiot

of myself guiding you over Oxford when you've been here to college."

"I won a Cecil Rhodes scholarship. My father was very anxious for me to have what he called a 'sound academic base' before I began to specialize. At the time I was in a hurry to begin my own work, and not keen to come here; but now I realize more and more deeply what it has meant to me. The interest on my debt to the great Englishman piles up every year. Beyond all, New brought McNeill into my life. His was the straightest thinking I have ever known. He was killed early in the war, as happened to so many university men."

At the sympathy in Joan's face he continued gently:

"This is my first visit to England since the war. I felt that it would be funkling it not to come to Oxford, but this morning I braced for a hard day. When you asked to be my guide, I accepted it, because it promised some respite from my own thoughts. I couldn't understand it, of course, and I kept on thinking the explanation would come; but it never did, and you kept on 'guiding' as seriously as if your life depended on it."

"Not my life," she said with an embarrassment which bore the stamp of truth, "but my dinner." She explained her predicament, her cheeks rose-flushed over the absurdity of it. "You've heard of the 'deadly triangle'? The triangle in which I found myself was architecture, starvation, or making my own living."

"So you decided to spend the day guiding an architect!"

Joan almost rocked the boat in her humiliation and dismay.

"Are you anything else you shouldn't be?" she demanded hotly. "I teach you how to pronounce Magdalen, and you're an Oxford man. I tell you no students are at New College, and you went there. And I would run a mile to avoid poking around in a smelly, moldy Norman crypt, and of course you're an architect! Please just take me back to land and let me go."

For answer he sped the boat forward.

"Now as to the money," he began. "All you have to do is to indorse your check to me, and I'll send it home to deposit to my account there, and cash it for you in dollars. I haven't that much in pounds with me. Simple, isn't it? And if you'll do me the infinite honor of having dinner with me,

we'll stave off starvation until you can go to the bank in the morning and change your dollars into pounds. What shall we do with the three and six, and why did you hit on that particular amount?"

"Because I saw a sign at a tea-shop: 'Table d'hôte dinners for three shillings.' The sixpence was to tip the waiter. Keep the shillings, but I do want my sixpence, please! It's the first money I ever earned, and I did earn it honestly, didn't I?"

"You were the most conscientious and the very funniest little guide who ever guided," he teased. "I lived three years here without seeing many of the things I've seen to-day—the doctor's teapot, for instance. I'm convinced that of the thousands of tourists who see Oxford during the summer I am the only one invited to admire the clematis in the Botanic Garden, the fuchsias at Worcester, and that somewhat insignificant plant at St. John's. I begin to think of Oxford as a horticultural center, with a hint of learning on the side!"

To punt to Parson's Pleasure gave one leisure to discuss many things. There was time for him to allure her with the magic of "Mary Rose," and to make her promise to come to London for lunch and a matinee. In return, she began rather timidly—oh, but she should have blushed over human inconsistency!—to wonder why he had never seen that Jesse window. There was the merest breath of coaxing in her pretty voice as she explained that while other windows might have the descendants of Jesse in stained glass, this alone in all England had the tree and the descendants carved in stone, making it of incomparable interest to an architect.

His spirits rose to the zenith as she described the unique charms of that window—the window she had vowed never to see! He arranged to return on Friday, so that they might motor to Dorchester to visit it.

Then it would be time for Aunt Cornelia and Uncle Henry to return.

He indicated that it would give him inexpressible pleasure to meet them.

She returned that it would give her great pleasure to introduce them.

Their eyes met. Simultaneously, spontaneously, they sighed.

In all the world Aunt Cornelia Brennan was the last person who would ever have dreamed of that sigh. In fact, upon her return home she arrogated all the credit to herself.

"I never saw two people so perfectly absorbed in each other," she told her sister-in-law. "Joan is more interested in Richard than in her trousseau. It's an ideal match, and I'm happy to know that I made it. If I had not inculcated the worship of architecture in Joan, she would not have been more vitally interested in this young man than in any of the others. It was the common flame in both their hearts, and it was I who lighted it in Joan's. Why, those two would walk for miles and miles to see some ancient ruin where even Henry and I couldn't go because we couldn't take the car."

Mrs. Chenoweth smiled with the wisdom of mothers.

"Too bad they had to go alone! And you, Cornelia dear, are you as devoted to architecture as ever?"

Mrs. Brennan turned a surprised gaze on her.

"I? Oh, I fear I shall have little time to devote to Gothic art now. Beauty in stone led me back to a more fluidic, more docile form of beauty—that of the human form divine and its perfect expression in the dance. I met a most brilliant woman on the steamer coming home. She is to be my guest next week, and you will hear her lecture on prehistoric dances she studied from pottery made a thousand years before the Christian era. For me, my dear, architecture was but a threshold!"
